BERLIN:
THE COLD WAR'S NO. 1
POWDER KEG

WEST'S ROUTES OF ACCESS TO BERLIN
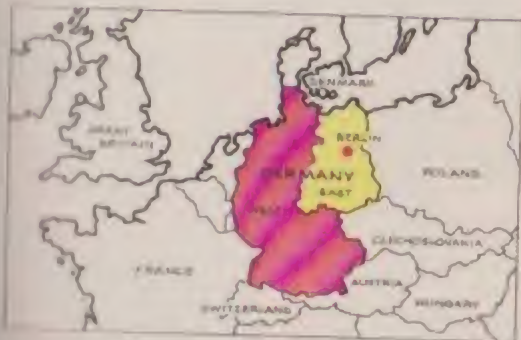
Divided country, divided city: Map at left shows the two Germanys; at right, the two Berlins and the West's entry routes into this city deep within Communist territory. West Germany (95,732 square miles, 52 million people) is far larger and richer than Communist East Germany (about half West's area, 17 million people). West and East Berlin each measure about 200 square miles, but West's 2.2 million population is twice East's.

Heading the list of global trouble spots likely to trigger World War III is the divided city of Berlin, sole island of freedom deep inside the Iron Curtain. Focus of international tensions since 1945, Berlin could any day provoke the biggest East-West crisis yet. Here's the background.

Berlin after Hitler's defeat As the capital of Hitler's Third Reich, Berlin in 1945 was the prime target for the invading forces of Britain, the United States, France and Russia. Soviet tanks got there first. But the four powers agreed to rule the city jointly, each occupying a separate sector. The whole territory of Germany was similarly divided, with the Russians occupying the Eastern zone of the country (now the Communist satellite known as the German Democratic Republic). The Western zones occupied by the three other allied powers became the Federal German Republic in 1949 (commonly called West Germany). Since Berlin lies one hundred miles inside the Soviet territory, the original agreements provided access to the city for the other powers through a limited number of highways, railroads and waterways, plus three air corridors. After three years of dispute over details of the joint rule of Berlin, arrangements broke down in June 1948 when the Russians plugged all ground routes to Berlin in a blockade attempt to force the Western allies out of the city. The allies countered by transporting over the next eleven months two million tons of food, coal and other goods into the blockaded city by air. In May 1949, their tactics foiled, the Russians again opened land routes to Berlin, but the city itself was permanently split. It remains totally divided into two sectors, each with its own government, transportation system, currency, gas, electricity and so on. The only link between sectors is a subway line and a couple of above-ground streetcar routes.

What led up to the current crisis? For most of the next decade, East-West disputes in Central Europe centred mainly on the problem of reunifying Germany but the Russians kept up steady pressure on Berlin through their puppet regime in East Germany, headed by

Walter Ulbricht, a die-hard German Communist. Russian threats were climaxed in November 1958 when Nikita Khrushchov revealed a new scheme to drive the allies out of West Berlin. He proposed that West Berlin be made a demilitarized free city — an unprotected island in the centre of the Soviet sea. The West strongly rejected this proposal since it was obvious that an independent West Berlin would quickly fall into Soviet hands, because its existence depends on substantial economic aid, raw materials and foodstuffs from West Germany. Khrushchov added to his proposal a thinly veiled threat: if the West doesn't agree to a free city, he will, through the East German regime cut off all routes to Berlin. An airlift similar to the 1948 effort would no longer be possible because of recently developed jamming

Ulbricht.

devices which would block air corridors. Khrushchov has not yet carried out this threat although his journey to East Berlin after last May's disastrous summit conference collapse made many people fear he would take action. All he did then was to say that he would "let the dust settle" until the new American president had taken office. So the Berlin situation smolders, deadlocked as it has been since 1945.

Why is Berlin so important? To the millions of people behind the Iron Curtain and especially in East Germany, West Berlin is a symbol that the West has not abandoned them entirely, an attitude that has been continually stressed in the pronouncements of Willy Brandt, the dynamic young mayor of West Berlin. On a more practical level, it's the last remaining funnel through which they can escape to freedom. East Berlin is relatively accessible to them, and from there they can simply take the subway or streetcars which still run into West Berlin. Of the 3.2 million East Germans who have escaped to the West since 1945, more than half have taken this route. For those East Germans afraid

Brandt.

to abandon their homes permanently, visits to West Berlin provide a showcase of freedom. They can read uncensored papers, attend movies showing the Western way of life and buy food items unavailable to them in their austerity-ridden sector. Refugees are still streaming into West Berlin at the rate of almost a thousand every day. This exodus is draining away vital members of the population of East Germany, including doctors, teachers, engineers and artists, and the Communists in attempting to stem this flow have become so strict about visits to West Berlin that they recently sentenced a woman to three months in jail who had been discovered smuggling back via the subway a bag of pepper. To the Western world, Berlin stands as the symbol that we have not accepted Soviet domination over Eastern Europe as permanent. To Germans on both sides of the curtain Berlin is a symbol of their belief that Germany can once again be reunited.

What is Canada's stand on Berlin? Because we are not directly involved, Canada has no independent position on Berlin. As members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, however, we are committed to "protect the liberty of the population of West Berlin."

Is there a Berlin solution in sight? Most diplomats doubt it. Both the Soviet and the West would lose too much face in abandoning their stands on a city which has become such a valuable symbol of their conflicting ideologies. Just after his inauguration in January, President John Kennedy summed up the importance of Berlin when he pledged that the U. S. would fight if necessary to defend Berlin, just as it would to defend New York or Paris. END

◀ CUT ALONG THIS LINE